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SR-71-A Weapon of War and Politics

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President Johnson broke open a new military secret news of a 2000-mph global reconnaissance plane—in the face of both the Soviets and Republican critics of his air-power policies.

He did it within the hour before his first meeting with Sen. Goldwater since the Republicans named him as the man to pry Johnson out of the White House.

Goldwater has been a leader of those critics.

Hence it seems fair to identify the SR-71 "strategic military aircraft," as the President described it at his news conference, as a potent weapon of both war and politics.

Lockheed is developing the SR-71 as an offshoot of the A-11 high altitude interceptor which the President dramatically took off the secret list last Feb. 29 at another of his news conferences.

That news caught everybody by surprise. So did his latest announcement.

"First we ever heard of the airplane," said officers on the Armed Forces news desk at the Pentagon when word of the SR-71 flashed from the White House. The President didn't name the maker of the SR-71 and they had no idea.

It was some time before official confirmation came of

what most aviation writers suspected immediately—the SR-71 is another product from the design board of C. L. (Kelly) Johnson, maestro of the Lockheed "Skunk Works" at Burbank, Calif.

This Johnson—no relation to LBJ of Texas but rather a 54-year-old genius from Ishpeming, Mich.—conceived the U-2, most celebrated spy plane ever built, but a "model T" obviously to the SR-71.

Kelly Johnson it was, who then went on to design the A-11, heavily built of Titanium and, in the President's words of last February, capable of outperforming "any aircraft in the world."

Neither should one overlook the fact that LBJ late this Spring took to riding around in a Lockheed Jetstar, a small corporate jetliner, instead of a big 707, to save taxpayers' dollars. Yes, Kelly Johnson designed the Jetstar, too.

Is it any wonder, then, that the name of Kelly Johnson appeared on this year's White House list of Medal of Freedom winners? This is the nation's highest civilian award, a decoration the late President Kennedy established

President Johnson called the SR-71 a billion dollar project begun in February, 1963, and due to equip Strategic Air Command with the first operational units in 1965.